The Guelph Spring Festival - a retrospective view, 1968–1972

by: Eugene Benson

When I wrote an article in ‘Opera Canada’ four years ago introducing Canadian audiences to the Guelph Spring Festival, few of the organizers dreamed that the Festival would grow so quickly to attain such fame within so short a time.

That first festival was a very modest one in terms of budget and the number of artistic events presented. Very properly, the first festival mounted an artistic exhibition on the life of Edward Johnson, it commissioned two original works by C. Wilson and G. Ridout, it provided choral concerts given by the Festival Singers of Canada, under Elmer Iseler and the Guelph Light Opera Company under Dr. Charles Wilson. Drama was represented by the Instant Theatre of Montreal and Lois Marshall was chosen as the featured vocalist. By a happy coincidence, Dr. Wilson will conduct the opening concert of this year’s festival. Godfrey Ridout will present his second work written for the Festival, and Lois Marshall will also be back with us.

Under the energetic presidency of Dr. M. H. M. MacKinnon, Dean of Arts at the University of Guelph, sponsored by the Edward Johnson Music Foundation, and inspired by the Foundation’s Artistic Director, Nicholas Goldschmidt, the University’s Director of Music, the shape and philosophy of the Guelph Spring Festival began to emerge. From a mere six presentations in 1968, we have grown to a Festival offering 14 performances, excluding exhibitions and related events. The growth of the Festival can also be seen in other ways. In 1968, the budget was just over $24,000; this year’s budget is $75,000. The original board of directors was comprised of 9 members. This year it is nineteen and includes representatives from London, Hamilton and Toronto. In 1968, we operated one Box office, whereas this year, we shall have four box offices. In 1971, the Edward Johnson Music Foundation Guild was established under the Presidency of Mrs. H. C. Krug of Kitchener.

But if there has been great growth with each year’s festival, there have also been reassuring signs of continuity. Dr. MacKinnon was president of the Festival in its first four years and will hopefully return as president in 1972-73. Nicholas Goldschmidt, year by year, brings a wealth of artistic knowledge to the planning and execution of our Festival. Peter Gifford continues as treasurer and I continue as administrative director. Barbara Wolfond has been responsible each year for publicity and she has been largely instrumental in making out-of-town guests appreciate not only the Festival, but the charm of the City of Guelph. Finally, Edith Kidd, concert manager at the University of Guelph, has continued each year to give her time and talent in co-ordinating ticket sales and other business matters. The Board of Directors has been particularly loyal to the ideals of the foundation and each month devote much time to the planning.

It would be inaccurate to suggest, of course, that everything always runs smoothly. Beverly Sills was forced, because of illness, to cancel her recital in the 1971 festival at something like 30 hours notice. Nicholas Goldschmidt’s telephone was busy for hours as he search frantically in North America and Europe for a suitable replacement. Jan Peerce, who substituted for Beverly Sills, received a standing ovation and rave critical notices.

(If it is sometimes jokingly maintained that at least one member of the Board of Directors of the Foundation must be a medical doctor who can render aid and comfort to the Festival’s harried administrative team!)

The festival grows from year to year. Each performer and event is chosen with great care, our productions of opera, like all other events, are totally professional and always incorporate original staging, lighting and costume and presentation. The students of the University of Guelph are employed in subsidiary roles (lighting, stage construction) and this year the bill for student labour will be over $3,000.

But perhaps the directors of the festival are proudest of the fact that we have always been supported by the City of Guelph and its citizens. The City Council gives the Festival a generous grant, the University provides space and a great deal of administrative talent. We like to think that our audiences agree with the words of the late Edward Johnson of Guelph: “Make no small plans, for they have no power to excite the minds and hearts of men.”
Special Birthday Party

The Fifth Guelph Spring Festival will open with a Special Birthday Party. The delightful film "Tales of Beatrix Potter" will have its first showing in Guelph. Members of the Royal Ballet, directed by Sir Frederick Ashton, bring to life the enchanting animal characters in a performance to delight young and old alike. A full-scale birthday party, complete with ice-cream and cake will follow. The party is included in the film admission price.

Friday, April 28 – 8:30 p.m. Palace Theatre Party – St. George’s Hall.

Ravi Shankar

Ravi Shankar, who introduced the delicate sounds of the sitar to the West will give the fifth concert this year. This talented artist has done much to promote the narrowing of the gap on the contemporary music scene and to promote the popularisation of the music of the East. Assisting Ravi Shankar will be the famous Indian tabla player, Allan Rakha. Following his usual custom Ravi Shankar will announce his program as he performs. During his stay in Guelph, he will conduct a student seminar at the University of Guelph.

Thursday, May 4 – 8:30 p.m. – War Memorial Hall.

The Guelph Concert Singers in Rehearsal

Bourchard and Morissett

"The perfection in duo-piano playing" is how a Milan paper described the husband and wife piano team Victor Bourchard and Renee Morisset. Both performers are from Quebec and have received wide acclaimation for their artistry and technique. They will present a program of music by Bach, Mozart, Brahms, Bizet and Darius Millhaud.

Sunday, April 30 – 8:30 p.m. – War Memorial Hall.

Toronto Symphony Orchestra

This year, the Toronto Symphony Orchestra celebrates its 50th Anniversary and the Guelph Spring Festival is proud to host this fine orchestra and its great conductor Karel Ancerl on this auspicious occasion. The magical rapport which flows between Ancerl and his 95 musicians will once more enthral the audience in a performance that includes Schubert's Third Symphony, the Leonora Overture No. 3 and the First Symphony of Maler. This concert will be followed by "Festival Frolic", a supper-dance at the Wharf.

Friday, May 5 – 8:30 p.m. – Physical Education Building, University of Guelph.

Regional Choir

The Gala Opening Concert features the Guelph Concert Singers and the Hamilton Bach Elgar Choir under the baton of Dr. Charles Wilson. Dr. Wilson was recently appointed composer-in residence for the Canadian Opera Company. Together with members of the Hamilton Philharmonic, these well-known musicians will perform Bruckner's Requiem Mass No. 2 in E. Minor, An Apostrophe of the Heavenly Hosts by Healy Willan and a specially commissioned work. This commission will be Godfrey Ridout's second work premiered by the Guelph Spring Festival and is entitled Cantones Mystica No. 3. Allan Monk, Baritone, of the San Francisco Opera, is the soloist.

Saturday, April 29 – 8:30 p.m. – Church of Our Lady.

Tales of Beatrix Potter

Marshall and Forrester

Maureen Forrester

Two of Canada's most renowned singers will grace the stage for a unique joint recital during this fifth Guelph Spring Festival. Lois Marshall and Maureen Forrester will offer duets and solos from the works of Brahms, Schumann, de Falla and Debussy. The program will also include some well-loved folk songs. This "first time ever" event should be a capacity event and will be recorded live for CBC.

Monday, May 1 – 8:30 p.m. – War Memorial Hall.

Nicholas Goldschmidt
Artists & Events 1968–72

The following artists and artistic events are representative of the Guelph Spring Festivals’ Offerings between 1968 and 1972.

Solo Artists

Conductors
Nicholas Goldschmidt, Charles Wilson, Elmer Isler, Karl Munchinger, Mario Bernardi, Karel Ancerl, Francois Provencher, and Alexander Brett.

Productions
The Prodigal Son (Britten), The Montreal Instant Theatre, The Life and Death of Herod, The Village Barber (Schenk), The Toronto Dance Theatre, The Black Box Theatre, The Burning Fiery Furnace (Britten), and Noye’s Fludde (Britten).

Orchestras and Groups

Directors
Lode Verstraeen, Jean Marc Landier, Myra Benson and William Lord (designer).

Commissioned Composers
Charles Wilson, Godfrey Ridout, Lorne Betts, Talivaldis Kenins, Gerhard Wunsch, Andre Prevost and George Fiala.

Exhibitions
Edward Johnson Exhibition, Quebec Religious Art, Beethoven: The Man and his Time, Rodin and his Contemporaries, Life Style of Our Forefathers Düür and his Contemporaries, German Expressionist Prints and Festival Manuscripts 68-72.

Films
Religions of the World, Civilization, The Tales of Beatrix Potter and Pagliacci.

Francois Provencher

A new experience for Guelph audiences will be the exciting evening of song and dance, Choeur V’La L’ Bon Vent from La Belle Province, under their dynamic conductor Francois Provencher, sixty entertainers will present French Canadian and International folk songs and dancing. Their program includes arrangements from Jesus Christ Superstar, Love Story and Hair as well as traditional folk music. Truly an evening of universal appeal.

Saturday, May 6 — 8:30 p.m. J. F. Ross Hall.

Mauve Tea

For an hour or two leave the present day behind and enter the 18th century world of the mock heroic, the polished couplet, the age of elegance and bawdy wit. Your guides — two gifted Stratford actors — Jane Casson and Eric Donkin, in their presentation of an 18th century revue “Manners, Matters and Mauve Tea.” While the rapier wit cuts and thrusts and the fans flutter, the bedroom and boudoir are never far away.

Sunday, May 7 — 8:30 p.m. J. F. Ross Hall.

Pagliacci

A personal appearance of world famous Canadian Tenor Jon Vickers will highlight a showing of the opera “Pagliacci.” Mr. Vickers will introduce this film in which he stars and which was produced and conducted by the renowned Herbert von Karajan with the Company and Orchestra of La Scala of Milan. Leoncavallo’s opera portrays the anguish and grief behind the lives of a group of strolling players and the tragedy enacted out during a performance of Columbine and Harlequin.

Monday, May 8 — 8:30 p.m. Palace Theatre.

Candian Film Premieres

One day of the Guelph Spring Festival will be devoted to the art of the motion picture. All the films shown will be new Canadian Productions. Two full-length feature films and several short documentaries will be premiered on this occasion. Gerald Pratley, the well-known film critic will coordinate this venture into this exciting art media. A different program will be presented afternoon and evening.

Wednesday, May 10 — 2 p.m. and 8:30 p.m. Palace Theatre.

Noyé’s Fludde

The Chester Miracle plays were written in the 14th Century by ordinary people for performance by the craftsmen and tradesmen of the town. “Noye’s Fludde”, one of these plays, adapted and set to music by Benjamin Britten should delight audiences just as our 14th century counterparts revelled in the fun of the pageants of the Middle Ages. The Guelph production stars Allan Monk, Patricia Rideout, Donald Davis as well as over 100 local children both as singers and instrumentalists. Conducted by Nicholas Goldschmidt and staged by Myra Benson on a medieval fairy tale ark designed by William Lord, this opera will have five performances.

OPENING: Thursday, May 11 — 8:30 p.m. Church Of Our Lady. Also: Friday, May 12 and Saturday, May 13 — 4 p.m. and 6 p.m.

William Lord’s Set For Noye’s Fludde

McGill Chamber Orchestra

Chamber Music enthusiasts can look forward to a treat when the distinguished McGill Chamber Orchestra under conductor Alexander Brott performs works by Vivaki, Mozart and Bartok. Joseph Macerollo, the Guelph-born classical accordionist of international fame, will be the guest artist in the world premier of a commissioned work by George Fiala.

Friday, May 12 — 8:30 p.m. War Memorial Hall.
Marilyn Horne

The Fifth Guelph Spring Festival will close in truly splendid style with a concert recital by mezzo-soprano Marilyn Horne. Considered one of the most outstanding singers of our day, Miss Horne will sing operatic arias and lieder with selections from Handel and Donizetti, as well as folk songs. This will be Marilyn Horne's only recital in Canada during the 1971-72 season and is a must for every music lover and enthusiast.
Saturday, May 13 – 8:30 p.m. War Memorial Hall.

Related Events

During the Guelph Spring Festival, a number of related events and exhibitions are arranged.

German Expressionist Prints
For the first time graphics from the extensive collection at McMaster University will be shown at an outside gallery. This exhibition includes woodcuts, etchings, dry points and lithographs of eleven German artists during the period 1890-1930. The term "expressionism" is used to describe the work of younger German artists who rejected the academic style of the 19th Century. Artists represented include: Kaethe Kollwitz, Ernst Barlach, Lovis Corinth, Emil Nolde, Oskar Kokoschka, Ludwig Meidner, Max Beckman and Otto Dix. Illustrated lecture by Professor G. Wallace, Professor of Fine Art, McMaster University, Tuesday, May 9 at 12 noon. Room 107, Arts building.

EXHIBITION: McLaughlin Library University of Guelph – April 30-May 24.

Guelph Spring Festival – Canadian Composers
A collection of original manuscripts and works commissioned by Edward Johnson Music Foundation and given world premiere at Guelph Spring Festival. Included, Fiala, Betts, Prevost, Wilson, Ridout, Kenins, First Floor Gallery, Arts building, April 30-May 13.

Symposium
"Where is Opera Going" — Distinguished Speakers include M. Maurice Huisman, Director of the Opéra National, Théâtre Royale de la Monnaie, Brussels. May 11 – 12 noon, Room 107, Arts building, University of Guelph.

Effie Smith Exhibition

Prima Festa
An evening of Italian entertainment with singing and dancing and traditional food and wine. Profits from this event are used to help handicapped children of Guelph. Guelph Curling Club – Woolwich Street. May 12.

Edward Johnson Music Foundation

The Guelph Spring Festival is sponsored by the Edward Johnson Music Foundation and, in its first five years, has brought some of the finest music and artists in the world to Guelph. The

Post-concert Parties

It has always been part of the appeal of the Guelph Spring Festival that post-concert parties are arranged to enable audiences to meet the artists. These public receptions are always self-supporting and are convened by Mrs. C. Wilson for the E. J. M. Foundation and Mrs. J. Wexler for the E. J. M. F. Guild. This year the following receptions have been arranged.


In addition the children taking part in Noye's Fludde will be sustained between performances by volunteers from the E. J. M. F. Guild and the large orchestral groups will be hosted in the same way.